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Gender Differences and Store Characteristics: A Study of Australian Supermarket Consumers

Dr. Gary Mortimer Queensland University of Technology, Queensland
Dr. Peter Clarke Griffith University, Queensland

Abstract

It is argued, there is a paucity of research with regard to male and female consumer behaviour in the context of supermarket shopping in Australia. The purpose of this paper is to identify the differences between male and female shoppers rating the importance of store characteristics within an Australian Supermarket retail environment. A survey gathered data from two hundred and eighty male and female grocery shoppers, across four major Brisbane supermarkets. A simple-random-sample, collection methodology was employed to collect data. Significant statistical differences between male and female grocery shoppers were evident on all ten store characteristics constructs. Significant gender differences featured on twenty-eight of thirty scale items tested. Female grocery shoppers considered supermarket store characteristics more important than male shoppers. This study has implications for sociology, gender studies and consumer behaviour disciplines. It also has commercial implications for food retail management and consumer marketing activities that can positively influence consumer participation levels, increased store revenues and profitability.

Keywords: Consumer Marketing, Supermarket Retailing, Gender Behaviour, Store Attributes.

Introduction

Grocery shopping has long been considered to be the responsibility of the female spouse. However, modern social and demographic movements are causing changes to traditional gender roles within the home. As a result, Australian men are engaging in grocery shopping more frequently. Internationally, there are consumer behaviour studies concerning male food shopping (Richbell and Kite 2007; Beynon, Moutinho and Veloutsou 2010; Helgesen and Nettet 2010), yet research in the Australian context is minimal. While regular food shopping by men is on the rise, the perceptions and realities of male shopping behaviour remain under researched. Consequently, three relevant research questions emerge.

RQ1: *Do male and female grocery shoppers consider important store characteristics differently?*

RQ2: *Which store characteristics do men consider more important?*

RQ3: *Which store characteristics do women consider more important?*

This paper examines the behaviour of male and female grocery shoppers in the Australian retail context. It identifies important store characteristics and examines the gender differences placed on the importance of these characteristics. This paper makes a theoretical contribution to the marketing, consumer behaviour and supermarket retailing disciplines and is a platform for additional research into male consumer choice behaviour at the supermarket.

Male and Female Grocery Shopping Behaviour

Changes to traditional household gender roles are outcomes of progressive social and demographic movements (Bhatti and Srivastava 2003). There is now a greater acceptance of working mothers, and women now have greater access to higher incomes due to professional occupations and improved education (Murcott 2000). Consequential changes within the family unit means more men engage in supermarket shopping as a voluntary or necessary task (Richbell and Kite 2007). Gender is shaped through the experiences of institutional and social mores and is constantly redefined and negotiated in the everyday practices and interactions (Poggio 2006). When family members interact with each other, they construct their own family-level discourse (Blume and Blume 2003). Sociologists argue that culture and society are more powerful explanatory mechanisms than nature and biology (Shilling 1993).

Supermarket shopping behaviour studies cover a number of topics. Davies and Bell (1991) assessed time taken, basket size and expenditure of male and female shoppers. Their key findings indicate men bought fewer items and thus took less time to complete the shopping task. The male's expenditure was higher per minute because men seldom comparison shop (Underhill 1999). Piper and Capella (1993) profiled male grocery shoppers as less than 34 years, white-collar, professional with high levels of education and income. Such demography is similarly supported by others (Dholakia 1999). Research (Thomas and Garland 2004) also found men generally do not prepare lists.

According to Polegato and Zaichkowsky (1994) the shopping experience incurs pre-planning, task management, store loyalty and store characteristics. In the pre-planning stage, the evidence suggests: that older men plan more than young men and men shop at different times than women. In task management, men did not seek assistance; used shopping lists less frequently than women; did not compare prices or use catalogues and did not stick to a defined budget. Regarding store loyalty, men routinely patronised the same store. Women were more inclined to shop around for the best buy. Finally, helpful assistants, friendly checkout operators and easy parking were more important to women than they were to men.

Men shop for groceries with greater frequency than women (Polegato and Zaichkowsky 1994) and men, who claim to be the main grocery shopper, enjoyed the task and gained positive reinforcement from the family's appreciation of their involvement in grocery shopping (Dholakia, et al. 1995). Otnes and McGrath (2001) defined three stereotypical models of male shopping behaviour: 'Grab and Go'; 'Whine and Wait'; and 'Fear of the Feminine'. Yet, when shopping with female partners, men undertake a helpful role. In addition, men shop for 'female-coded' products (lingerie, perfume, beauty products) for status, control or to further intimacy. Male respondents believed men should take a more active role in shopping and viewed grocery shopping as a family activity rather than a responsibility of the household female (Piron 2002). In this case, men mostly act as influencers in the grocery decision-making process. Anecdotal evidence suggests men 'tear through the aisles', whereas women take their time; Men do not ask for help or directions, do not compare prices, do not like to shop for feminine products and are more likely to buy on impulse (Cockburn-Wooten 2003).

Men and women place greater importance on different store characteristics (Polegato and Zaichkowsky 1994; Helgesen and Nettet 2010). One third of male shoppers consider quality fresh produce and meat, a wide product range and one-stop shopping as being important (Donegan (1986). Men rate identifiable pricing and the ability to complete the shopping in the fastest possible time to be important store characteristics (Fitch 1985). However late trading hours, easy car-parking facilities, discount coupons, helpful staff and value-added services (such as dry cleaning or home delivery) appeared to be of less interest to men, but more important to women (Donegan 1986). Similarly, Polegato and Zaichkowsky (1994) indicate frequent sales, helpful sales personnel, being in stock, accurate checkouts, attractive décor, convenient locations and easy access were all store characteristics more highly regarded by women than they were by men. That car parking is of little interest to men tends to suggest they feel at ease in accessing the supermarket, or they are alone and need not concern themselves with heavy shopping bags and children.

Method and Results

The methodological approach entailed a pilot study with an even split of twenty five male and female undergraduate students with grocery shopping experience. Several changes refined the instrument. The final survey contained thirty important store characteristics items and measurement was via a five-point Likert-type scale. Three question statements addressed each store characteristic. These drew from a series of items on the importance of in store promotions and weekly specials (Polegato and Zaichkowsky 1994); the availability of advertised specials and promotional lines (Polegato and Zaichkowsky 1994); product availability, being in stock and limited stock outs (Donegan 1986) as well as consistent, stable, everyday low prices (Polegato and Zaichkowsky 1994). Another general area concerned the effective staffing of serviced departments, such as Delicatessen and Butchery (Donegan 1986; Torres, Summers and Belleau. 2001); friendly, efficient and accurate register operations (Deitrich 1981; Zeithaml 1985) and the cleanliness and hygienic practices in relation to food handling that associated with the importance of quality fresh food (Donegan 1986). The final series considered easy access, egress and sufficient car parking (Donegan 1986) together with the convenience of trading times and locality (Zeithaml 1985; Polegato and Zaichkowsky 1994).

A sample cohort of 280 respondents was drawn from four suburbs with significantly different socio-economic demographics. This study concerns male and female grocery shoppers who primarily or equally undertake the weekly grocery-shopping task. A grocery shopper was

defined as a person, who was not an employee, supplier or manager, but was entering a supermarket with a basket or trolley to purchase food products. All individual men and women entering a chosen supermarket were within the sample frame. As data collected from couples shopping together could produce a biased response, they were omitted. A screening question was employed to eliminate vendors, employees, suppliers and management from the sampling frame. The choice of supermarkets drew from the two market leaders who operate under oligopoly style conditions. A total of 280 respondents were selected across four supermarkets. In an effort to reduce bias in sampling, every fifth shopper was approached and invited to participate in the study. Previous sample sizes cover: 70 respondents (Thomas et al 2004); through to 150 respondents (Piron 2002).

Results

Bivariate correlations, factor analyses and *t*-tests were employed. Ten important store characteristic constructs were each developed from three Likert-scale items. Bivariate correlation analysis ensured each bank of three scale items produced correlation coefficient, *r*, greater than .500 (Malhotra, Hall *et al.* 2006). Confirmatory factor analyses were utilised, with all but one item producing high-loading markers. Factor analysis was used to reduce data to ten constructs. Sample sizes of between 140 and 160 are sufficient for factor analysis if solutions have several high-loading marker variables, above 0.60 (Pallant 2007). This research held KMO values over or very close to 0.80. A series of factor analyses (Table 1) confirmed the ten proposed constructs and an independent samples *t*-test sought to identify significant statistical differences between male and female shoppers.

Table 1 Factor Analysis

Code	Item Description	Communalities		Initial Eigenvalues		
		Initial	Extraction	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
X1	Weekly Specials	1	0.923	2.476	82.526	82.526
X2	Regular Discounts	1	0.952	0.407	13.565	96.091
X3	Frequent Promotions	1	0.847	0.117	3.909	100.000
X4	Well Staffed Departments	1	0.737	0.233	7.502	77.502
X5	Served Quickly	1	0.943	0.596	19.865	97.366
X6	No Waiting	1	0.944	0.079	2.634	100.000
X7	Instock of Specials	1	0.913	2.569	85.618	85.618
X8	No Specials Out of Stock	1	0.949	0.279	9.313	94.931
X9	Specials I want	1	0.913	0.152	5.069	100.000
X10	Accurate Operators	1	0.891	1.882	62.717	62.717
X11	Friendly Operators	1	0.907	0.858	28.598	91.315
X12	Efficient Operators	1	0.514	0.261	8.685	100.000
X13	Easy Parking	1	0.880	1.950	64.995	64.995
X14	Easy Access to Carpark	1	0.904	0.791	26.357	91.352
X15	Parcel Pick Up Area	1	0.598	0.259	8.648	100.000
X16	Well Stocked Shelves	1	0.839	1.881	62.705	62.705
X17	Products I Want	1	0.858	0.732	24.412	87.117
X18	No Out of Stocks	1	0.664	0.386	12.883	100.000
X19	Convenient Locations	1	0.908	2.664	88.810	88.810
X20	Supermarket Easy to Find	1	0.968	0.260	8.660	97.470
X21	Supermarket Easy to Get To	1	0.950	0.070	2.530	100.000
X22	Cleanliness	1	0.918	2.225	74.167	74.167
X23	Hygienic Processes	1	0.934	0.638	21.255	95.422
X24	Quality Food Handling	1	0.714	0.137	4.578	100.000
X25	Quality Fresh Food	1	0.951	2.812	93.711	93.711
X26	Great Tasting Fresh Food	1	0.965	0.148	4.945	98.662
X27	Healthy Fresh Food	1	0.968	0.040	1.338	100.000
X28	Low Prices Everyday	1	0.961	2.864	95.464	95.464
X29	Consistent Prices	1	0.986	0.113	3.781	99.245
X30	Competitive Prices	1	0.984	0.023	0.755	100.000

Significant differences between genders were identified on all ten summated constructs. A second *t*-test identified significant statistical differences existed between the groups on all but the two of the thirty items. Differences were not detected on items related to department staffing and efficient register operations. Female shoppers rated all measured items more importantly than men; mean scores ranged between, 1.2 to 1.7 (Very Important – Important), on all thirty items. The mean scores of male shoppers spread widely; 1.2 to 2.8 (Important – Neutral). Both groups produced one outlier, Parcel Pick-Up Availability, female mean 3.6 and male mean 4.3. The store characteristics men identified as most important were No

Waiting and Getting Served Quickly (\bar{x} 1.2), Efficient Register Operations (\bar{x} 1.5), Well Staffed Service Departments (\bar{x} 1.7) and Weekly Specials (\bar{x} 1.9). Four of the five store characteristics considered most important to men aligned with speed and ease of shopping. The store characteristics female shoppers tended to consider more important related to price, value for money and cleanliness. Regular Discounts, Consistent Pricing, Competitive Prices, Low Everyday Prices, Hygienic Food Handling Processes and High Quality Food Handling all held a mean of 1.2.

Discussion

This study examined the behaviour of male and female grocery shoppers in the Australian retail context. It identified important store characteristics and examined differences male and female shoppers place on the importance of these characteristics. Male and female shoppers agree that interactions with register operators are an important characteristic of the grocery shopping experience. Both groups considered Parcel Pick-Up availability unimportant. Hence a parcel pick up facility may present an underused or ignored aspect of grocery retailing services. While home delivery overcomes mobility or transport problems there is anecdotal evidence of shoppers happy to push the trolleys of groceries to their vehicle or taxi cab.

While males participate in the grocery shopping experience, the task appears as a possible inefficient use of time, as males generally display the grab and go attributes (Otnes and McGrath 2001). Four of the five store characteristics considered most important to men align with speed and ease of shopping. The frame of mind still pursues the importance of no waiting and being served quickly as the more important attributes, while efficient register operations and well staffed service departments are important contributors. There is an old social paradigm where women do the shopping and men control the money, irrespective, weekly specials are important to male shoppers but not as important as pricing is to females. Convenient locations are important to both male and female shoppers; however, men did not rate this level of importance as highly as did women. On the item 'easy to get to' male respondents tended to align with a neutral position. This suggests that male grocery shoppers are not deterred by the difficulties of getting to a supermarket. The difficulties in getting to the supermarket may include transport issues, work constraints and other temporal barriers.

Females appear more objective in their approach to important grocery store characteristics. Females tend towards price, discounts, value for money, consistent and competitive prices as well as low, everyday prices. Apart from the money management aspects, females tend toward the nurture and caring aspect because hygienic, high quality food handling processes and store cleanliness are equally important characteristics. On the other hand, men could possibly purchase pre-packaged or tinned products that do not require the same level of food handling as for perishable items. The extent of this study creates a vehicle for future research in food retailing and consumer behaviour. The study examined supermarket characteristics that men and women consider important, an area of future interest could be the relationship of time constraints on these characteristics.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding considerable growth in supermarket shopping participation levels, men have been tended to be overlooked in consumer behaviour research and in the context of grocery shopping. Anecdotally, it has been suggested that men don't enjoy, or are unwilling, unengaged participants, in the shopping task. However, this classic version of the male shopper type is not present in this sample. The steady growth of male grocery shoppers tends to suggest the opposite. This study revealed the specific store characteristics considered important to men, those that are important to women.

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